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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

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Defense of the Operational Rear

by

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The equipping of the Soviet Army with missile/nuclear weapons and other modern equipment has compelled us, in recent years, to reexamine, as is well known, many questions of the theory of military art. In particular new principles of the organization and activity of the operational rear have been worked out and put into practice. However, in the process of carrying out this great work, which is directed toward the further perfecting of the operational rear, the defense of the operational rear has, unfortunately, not been studied in sufficient depth.

Meanwhile, in modern conditions of carrying out armed conflict, this matter has acquired great significance. In this article we shall examine two questions of this complicated problem, namely, the defense of the rear against ground forces of the enemy and antiair defense of installations of the operational rear.

In examining the defense of the operational rear, it is necessary to consider two propositions: the striving of the probable enemy to disorganize the rear of our troops and the changing character of modern operations, and the results of this and the conditions of work of the operational rear.

As a result of study of the views of the probable enemy, the conclusion may be made that in future operations the neutralization and destruction of the most important rear area installations and disorganization of the work of the rear will be achieved by carrying out strikes with missile/nuclear weapons and conventional means of destruction against our rear area installations, and also by wide use of operational and tactical airborne landings for the purpose of carrying the struggle into

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the operational depth , destroy depots of nuclear weapons, break up the maneuver of reserves, and disrupt the work of the rear as a whole. A number of sabotage-intelligence groups will be sent into the rear of our troops, obviously, with the tasks of accomplishing various types of sabotage, attacking rear installations and sowing panic among the population.

The opinion is expressed abroad that it is advantageous to operate against the rear of the enemy with airborne landings or sabotage-intelligence groups; even small groups of saboteurs are able to disrupt the work of front missile-technical bases and thus degrade, or at least significantly weaken, the force of missile/-nuclear strikes and greatly disorganize antiair defense of troops. In exactly the same manner the action of sabotage-intelligence groups and airborne landings against bases and front communication routes can hamper, and at times completely disrupt, the supply of materiel means to troops.

Modern operations are distinguished by their large scale. They develop on a wide front and in great depth with combat operations connected with mutual breakthroughs of the opposing sides developing simultaneously and into the depth of the troop disposition, which creates very complicated conditions for the work of the operational rear. The rapid tempos and the maneuvering character of combat operations lead to more rapid movement of the struggle into the operational depth, into the depth of army and front rear areas.

The fact that there will not be a solid front in modern conditions, has great significance for the work of the operational rear. Combat operations will develop on separate axes, and, consequently, the operational rear will not have before it the dependable barrier "wall" of the solid front, under cover of which it operated in the past. To this must be added that the troops of the first echelon, advancing on separate axes,

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will not normally be diverted to the defeat and destruction of enemy groups, which are left on the flanks and in the rear. This task will now be accomplished by the forces of the second echelons and reserves.

Enemy groupings which have retained their combat effectiveness, and which are left in the rear of our troops, can temporarily block communication routes, carry out raids on important rear area installations, and thus complicate the situation to a significant degree. It is necessary to remember that the combat operations of our troops can develop on the territory of a country in the aggressive imperialistic military bloc, and it is fully possible that some part of the population ill-disposed toward us will carry out an active role in the rear of our troops.

In solving the problem of defense of the operational rear, it is essential to bear in mind the degree of importance of a number of installations and those forces and means which can be used for their defense.

There are 8 to 10 missile-technical bases of a front, or 3 separate missile-depot battalions, and missile fuel dumps, located and functioning in the operational rear. The importance of all of these installations is unquestioned. At the front missile-technical bases the assembly of the missile-carriers and nuclear warheads, the mating of missiles and the storage of reserve (zapas) missiles of the front are performed; from these bases they are transported to armies and to missile large units. The reserve of missile/nuclear weapons located at front missile-technical bases ensures fulfilment of further tasks of the front and the subsequent offensive operation. Moreover, the reserve of nuclear means is stored at bases, and the reserve of an aircraft guided missile is stored at antiaircraft missile-technical bases. However, the forces and means which are at the disposal of all the enumerated installations are sufficient

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for the organization of defense against an attack of only a small group of the enemy.

Rear front and forward front bases must also be considered in the number of important installations of the operational rear. Other rear units and establishments — technical, medical, and transport — are also grouped in the area of deployment of front bases, as a rule.

A deeper echeloning of reserves of materiel means, carried out in the course of the change of the basic principles of organization of the operational rear, would undoubtedly be a useful measure. But it is necessary to bear in mind that now about half of all front reserves are located at forward and rear front bases. This increases the dependence of the armies on daily delivery of materiel means from front depots. It follows that even a short interruption of front communication routes can lead to the breakdown of the planned support of troops of the first operational echelon of the front.

Field pipelines, whose most vulnerable points are the pumping stations, have great significance in supplying front troops with fuel. The protection of the pipelines, stretching for hundreds of kilometers, and also of the pumping stations, is obviously quite complicated. However, this task is entrusted to the personnel of the pipeline brigades, who do not have sufficient forces for this task.

For carrying out regular delivery of materiel means, evacuation , and maneuvering of reserves, it is necessary to have a developed network of railroad and automobile communication routes. If it is considered that in a front there are not less than two railroad communication routes, three or four basic front military automobile communication routes, and several lateral railroad and automobile routes, then

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the difficulties of the defense of front communication routes throughout their extensive length become apparent. Moreover, in the rear area of the front it is also necessary to defend the main communications links of the front and the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command with their powerful radio, radio-relay and telegraph communications centers.

And finally, in the rear area there will usually be 6 to 8 hospital bases with 15 to 20 thousand wounded in each, which would no doubt be objects of attack by enemy sabotage-intelligence groups.

During the preparation for an offensive operation, when troops in a tight grouping occupy a relatively stable position, there are more favorable conditions for defense of the rear. In the course of the operation, especially during high tempos of advance, the main mass of forces and weapons, and in particular of antiair defense, moves behind the troops, and the rear area of a front remains without any protection. This is explained by the fact that rear area installations of the front, by the nature of the tasks they fulfil, must work in the same place for a rather long time. The mobility of the main rear area installations must be considered far from satisfactory. Therefore, front missile-technical bases are moved once every two or three days, forward front bases, once every four or five days, and rear front bases are moved only once during a front offensive operation.

Thus, in modern operations the conditions of work of the rear will be significantly more complicated than in the last war, and the role of rear support will increase sharply. Now the success of combat operation of troops, as never before, has become dependent on reliable and prompt rear support. One of the decisive conditions for dependable and uninterrupted rear support of troops is the viability of the rear, i.e., the preservation of its ability to support troops

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in a complicated combat situation. Therefore the problem of defense of the rear has become one of the most critical problems, and if it is not solved there will be no guarantee of the success of the work of the rear, and along with this, the guarantee of success of the operation being carried out.

In these fundamentally altered conditions of the functioning and significance of the operational rear, the old, obsolete concepts, characteristic of the last war, unfortunately still survive. In agreement with these concepts, many persons consider that the entire grouping of rear area installations is to be protected by the operational troop formation, and, therefore, under no circumstances, are appropriate forces and means to be allocated for the defense of the rear, which is required to defend itself with its own forces and means. We are already accustomed to the expression, which in our opinion is trite: "the guarding and defense of the rear are carried out by forces and means of the rear", which, as a rule, is laid down in documents regulating the organization of these questions in the course of operations.

It is necessary to mention that in a number of theoretical works the question is raised of the insufficiency in the rear area of forces and means for the organization of its defense and protection. Thus in the fundamental work "The Rear Services in Modern Operations", it is indicated that "front and army rear units and establishments are spread out over a large area and have limited forces and means, so they are not in a position to organize reliable defense of the entire rear area. The accomplishment of this task is possible only by the utilization of combat units and large units of the front (army)" ... 1

1. The Rear Services in Modern Operations. Publishing Office of the Staff of the Rear Services of the Ministry of Defense, Moscow 1959, PP 261-262.

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However let us turn to the practice of the large operational exercises of the last few years.

In exercise "Don" (1960), no large units for the defense of the rear were provided for among the troops of the Don Front. Exactly the same situation occurred in the inter-academy exercise carried out by the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces in February 1961. In this exercise only one motorized-rifle regiment was designated for defense of the operational rear, from the combined-arms army of the second echelon of the front; it was returned to the army when the army was committed to combat, with the result that the rear area of the front was left without any forces and means of defense at all.

In the recent front two-stage operational-rear services exercise of the troops of the Carpathian Military District (July 1961), once again no troops were designated for the defense of the rear. As a result, the rear area of the front, with all the reserves of nuclear weapons, antiaircraft missiles, materiel, and many rear services units remained without any means of defense.

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Let us examine briefly the question of defense of the operational rear from enemy air strikes. With full justification it can be said that the amount of forces and weapons usually designated are clearly inadequate for direct antiair defense of large rear area installations. Let us examine two examples from the experience of operational exercises of 1961.

In the above-mentioned inter-academy exercises (February 1961), only one antiaircraft missile regiment was designated for the antiair defense of stationary depots of the Central Front, located 400 to 600 kilometers from the troops and at large railroad junctions; naturally it could not screen all rear area installations. As a result, the "enemy" carried out nuclear strikes with impunity against the rear area front bases and large railroad centers.

In the operational-rear services exercises of the Carpathian Military District, the chief of PVO of the 2nd Front, possessing sufficient forces and means for antiair defense of the principal areas of disposition of the troops and front rear area, did not organize the defense of the most important installations of the rear, concentrating the main efforts on protection of the troops. After the intervention of the leadership this condition was corrected to some extent. For protection of the rear area of the front in the departure position, 25 percent of the antiaircraft missile means of the front, front fighter aviation, and part of the forces of the 7th Army of the PVO of the Country were allocated. The antiair defense of rear areas was also strengthened by the means of the PVO screening the troops of the first operational echelon and the TO & E means of the troops of the second echelons and reserves.

Analyzing this decision, it is necessary to remark on two aspects. Firstly, the main installations in the rear area of the front (the rear area front base and its separate, forward front base, two mobile missile-technical bases, and two separate antiaircraft missile battalions) were screened only by fighter aviation; antiaircraft missile units were not designated for their defense at all.

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Secondly, installations of the army rear and the missile-technical bases close to the troops of the first echelon of the front were in favorable conditions, since they were in fact screened by the overall system of PVO of troops of the first echelon.

This example shows that in the period of preparation for the operation, the army rear as a whole is protected from strikes from the air, while protection of a number of the most important installations of the front rear area is not assured.

The chief director of the exercise pointed out at the critique that when the troops go over to the offensive, the PVO means of the armies and divisions move forward along with the troops and the antiair defense of the rear area of the front is greatly weakened. In spite of this, the strengthening of the antiair defense of the rear of the front after the transition of the troops to the offensive was not provided for in the plan of the PVO troops of the front. A most important failing, if not a defect, in the system of antiair defense of installations of the operational rear, is concealed herein, in our view.

In the pages of the Collections of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", completely contradictory views have been presented on the most important question of the defense of the rear: whether a gap occurs between the system of PVO of the troops of the front and the system of PVO of the Country during the course of a front offensive operation.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Comrade S. Biryuzov, in the article "Antiair Defense in Modern Warfare and Trends in Its Development",[1] considers that "toward the end of an offensive operation, a significant gap may occur between organic antiair defense and Antiair Defense of the Country."

1. Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", No. 3 (58) 1961, P. 10

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Marshal of Artillery Comrade V. Kazakov, in the article "Troops of Antiair Defense of the Ground Forces in Modern Operations",[1] on the other hand, indicates that "in reality no 'gap' arises".

The importance of this question in connection with the problem under examination in this article is that in this gap are located such very important installations of the rear as the regulating railroad junctions, part of the front missile-technical bases, the rear area front bases, and railroad and automobile communication routes of the front.

The experience of command-staff operational exercises, and in particular the operational rear services exercise in the Carpathian Military District, confirms that this gap does in fact exist, and that as the front advances, the main part of the means of antiair defense of troops also moves, with the result that the already limited forces of PVO of installations of the operational rear are reduced. The control of these means is complicated by the fact that toward the morning of the third day of the offensive operation, as occurred in the exercise of the Carpathian Military District, the majority of antiaircraft missile units protecting installations of the front rear area are located at a distance of 100 to 360 km from the front command post.

Thus, it may be considered that the operational rear is almost completely deprived of the forces and means required for the organization of ground defense of the most important rear area installations, and its antiair defense, usually conducted by limited forces, is not assured, especially in the course of the operation.

1. Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" No. 4 (59) 1961, P. 14

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This is why we consider that, in present conditions, it is necessary to support fully the proposals of Marshal of the Soviet Union Biryuzov — during the advance of the ground forces to a depth of 250 to 300 km, to widen the zone of responsibility of antiair defense of the country or of a border large unit of PVO by moving their borders forward behind the advancing troops, with simultaneous movement of part of its forces for protection of new installations.

A number of measures must be adopted in order to assure the viability of the operational rear. For this, first of all, it is necessary to have special units and large units for defense of the operational rear. Such a proposal is suggested by the experience of World War II, when, in a significantly less complicated situation, special units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were placed with combined-arms armies and fronts. Of course, it must be mentioned that the units carried out combat against sabotage-intelligence activity in the rear of the troops, and fulfilled obstruction functions, but did not carry out the defense of the most important installations of the front rear area from the ground enemy. At the present time we need large units and units which will be able to provide defense of the most important installations of the rear, above all front missile-technical bases, rear and forward front bases, antiair defense of rear area installations from low-altitude strikes, and to carry out combat with airborne landings and sabotage-intelligence activity in the rear area of the front.

In our opinion, it is necessary to have these units and large units in cadre form in peacetime, with short periods of mobilization and buildup. The above-mentioned organic units and large units of defense of the operational rear, naturally, will not be able to fulfil all tasks of the defense of the rear, but will become the backbone of the forward means of this defense. In specific conditions, depending on the situation in the operational rear, the commander of troops of the front will assign supplementary forces and means from among the combat large units to the jurisdiction of his deputy for the rear.

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Secondly, it is necessary to solve the problem of antiair defense of the operational rear. In our opinion it is necessary to determine accurately the tasks of antiair defense of troops for the protection of installations of the rear. It is especially important to think over thoroughly, and provide for the coordination of, the forces and means of antiair defense of troops and of antiair defense of the country in relation to the operational rear, so that in the course of an offensive operation the boundary of responsibility for antiair defense of the country is promptly carried forward behind the advancing troops.

Thirdly, it cannot be expected that defense of the rear will be fully provided by any sort of allocated or organic forces and means. It is of utmost importance to increase the defensive capability of rear units and establishments themselves, equipping them with close antitank defense and means of defense from strikes by the enemy from the air at low altitudes. It would also be advisable to have organic observation and warning of enemy air activity in the main rear services units and large units.

Fourthly, it is necessary to organize precise control of all forces and means which provide defense of the rear. For the solution of this problem, in our opinion, two measures must be carried out: the creation of a unified system for the defense of the operational rear and centralization of control of it. Under the direction of the deputy commander of front troops for the rear, a unified system must provide defense of the rear from the ground enemy, antiairborne defense combat against sabotage-intelligence activity of the enemy in the rear, warding off low-altitude air strikes, and protection of the rear from means of mass destruction.

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The necessity of strict centralization of the control protection, defense,and guarding of the rear was reaffirmed in the operational-rear services exercise in the Carpathian Military District. The chief director of this exercise properly pointed out that even the limited forces allotted to organic antiair defense for the defense of installations of the operational rear, quickly became uncontrolled because of their separation from the control point of the commander of troops of antiair defense of the front by a distance of 300 km or more.

We consider that it would be advantageous to combine the control of guarding, defense and protection of the rear in the hands of the assistant commander of the rear of the front for these problems, and to create in the headquarters of the rear of the front a special section for guarding, defending and protecting the rear, freeing the first department of the staff of the rear from those functions. It must be remembered that the deputy of the commanding officer of front troops for the rear has an unusually large amount of work in directing the operational rear. It is known that in the rear services of the front there are up to 500 rear services units, large units, and establishments, spread out over an enormous territory, which, in the course of a front offensive operation, reaches 400-600 thousand square kilometers.

In solving the problems of the control of all the forces and means of defense and protection of the rear, it is interesting to examine the pertinent experience of our probable enemies. Thus, for example, in the combined-arms large units and field army of the USA, it is proposed there will be a center for control of the rear, of which one function will be the direction of the activities of the organs of the rear for defense and protection of the rear areas and elimination of the effects of nuclear attack. In this center of control there is to be a special section for defense and protection of the rear.

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In the new conditions of conducting operations, questions of the guarding and defense of the rear have grown into a problem of great significance. And we are convinced, in the light of this, that its theoretical analysis and practical solution, aimed at raising the stability and viability of the rear, have considerable interest, and promote a further increase in the combat readiness of the operational war.

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